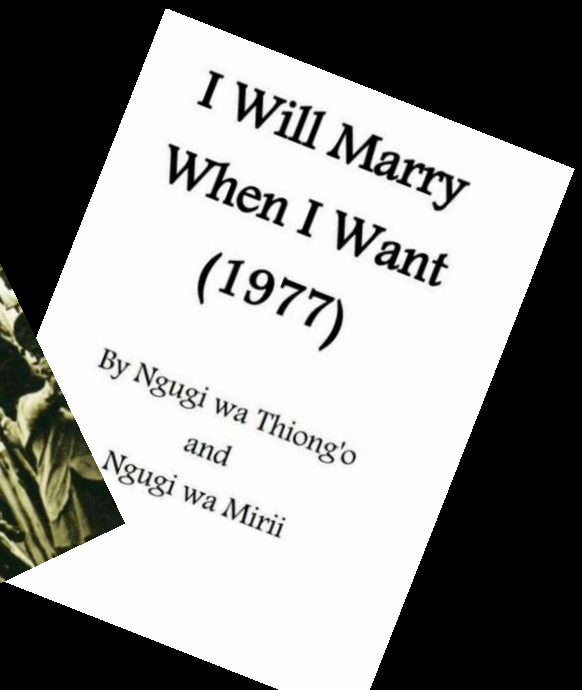
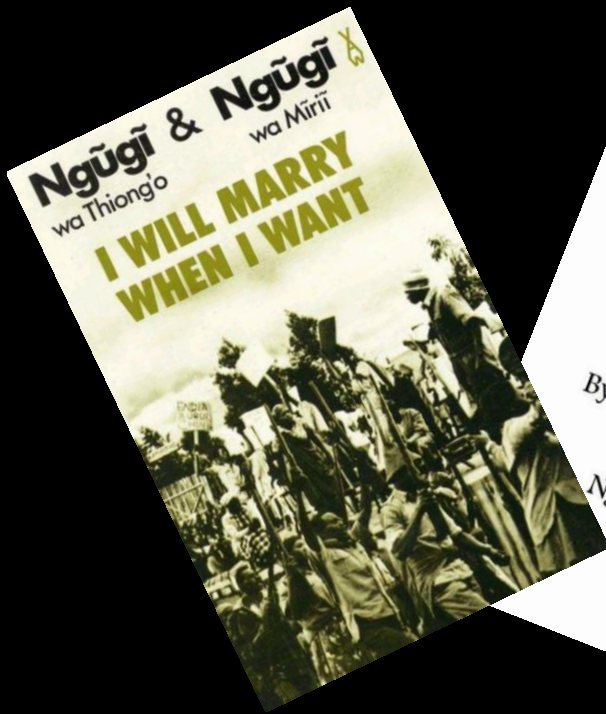


# ENG2209

## MODERN AFRICAN DRAMA

### TEXTUAL ANALYSIS II (I Will Marry When I Want)

<http://www.gradesaver.com/the-trials-of-brother-jero>



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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

*Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, born in 1938, Kenyan novelist and playwright, many of whose works concern issues of Kenyan independence. Born James Thiong'o Ngugi in Kamiriithu, he changed his name in the late 1960s. He received a B.A. degree in 1963 from Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, and another B.A. degree in 1964 from the University of Leeds in England.

Ngugi's first novel, *Weep Not, Child* (1964), was published while he was at school in England. Having returned to Kenya after finishing his studies, Ngugi's second novel *The River Between* (1965), had as its background the *Mau Mau rebellion* (1952-1956), in which a group of the Kikuyu people began a campaign of violence against the British, who controlled Kenya at the time. This subject reemerged in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), a novel in which Mau Mau bloodshed is set against celebrations of Kenyan independence. The impact of Ngugi's next novel, *Petals of Blood* (1977), a story discussing the poor quality of life in East Africa, particularly for Kenya's lower classes, even after independence from the United Kingdom in 1963, led to his detention in 1978 under Kenya's Public Security Act. He recounted his prison experience in *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981). The play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (1977; *I Will Marry When I Want*, 1982) held that those who had fought the hardest for independence had gained the least, a theme Ngugi returned to in the novel *Matigari* (1989).

Ngugi was chair of the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi from 1972 to 1977. He left Kenya in 1982 and taught at various universities in the United States before he became professor of comparative literature and performance studies at New York University in 1992. Ngugi's works of criticism include *Moving the Centre* (1993).

*Ngugi wa Marii* was born in Roromo, Limuru in 1951. He was educated in Nigeria Secondary School and from 1972-1974 with Kenya Posts and Telecommunication. He took a diploma in Adult Education at the Institute of Adult Studies, Nairobi University and then joined the institute he became involved with peasants and workers in Community Development at Kamirnthu, Limuru.

## I WILL MARRY WHEN I WANT

- *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*I Will Marry When I Want* is a controversial play that covers post-colonial themes of class struggle, poverty, gender, culture, religion, modernity vs. tradition, and marriage and family.

Set in post-independent Kenya, the play is a searing look at the legacies of colonialism and the difficulties Kenyans faced at the time.

### PLOT

The storyline of the play centres on a peasant farmer, *Kiguunda* and his wife, *Wangechi*, and their daughter, *Gathoni*. *Kiguunda's* most highly-prized possession is a one-and-a-half acres piece of land whose title deed he keeps carefully and often fingers gingerly and tenderly. The family are expecting a rare visit from the wealthy farmer and businessman, *Ahab Kĩoi wa Kanoru* and his wife, Jezebel. *Kĩgũũnda* works on one of Ahab's farms. The aim of this visit is a puzzle as it is unprecedented and they belong to different social classes.

But on recalling that the *Kĩois'* son, *John Mũhũũni*, has shown some amorous tendencies towards their daughter, they surmise that the purpose of the visit could be either to warn that the two don't see each other again, or to ask for *Gathoni's* hand in marriage. When it occurs to the two that the purpose of the visit could be to ask for *Gathoni's* hand in marriage, they reminisce of the days of their youthfulness and courtship, teasing each other in the process. But *Kĩgũũnda* recalls also

that both Ahab and his business partner, *Ikuua wa Nditika* are local directors of an international company that manufactures insecticides and *Ikuua* has written to ask *Kĩgũũnda* for his one and a half acres land in order to build a factory. This, he thinks, could also be the reason for this visit.

While waiting, *Kĩgũũnda* tries to mend the chair on which his guests will sit. *Wangeci*, meanwhile, prepares a meal. But *Gathoni* rather plaits her hair. In the process, a drunk comes into their courtyard teasing and inviting *Kĩgũũnda* for a drink, and singing, “I Shall Marry When I Want.” *Wangeci* drives him away and just then a group of singers come into the courtyard singing. They belong to the sect of the destitute and are trying to raise funds to build a church. *Kĩgũũnda* turns them away with the explanation that they can hardly feed their bellies let alone have money for fund-raising.

Eventually, the *Kĩois* and the *Ndugĩres* arrive. Their mission turns out to be to try to convince *Kĩgũũnda* and *Wangeci* to stop living in sin, as they put it, by getting married in the church. Having married his wife in the traditional way, *Kĩgũũnda* is sizzled because his marital relationship is described as sin. He reaches for his sword, and angrily drives them away.

Just then *Gathoni* enters looking particularly sizzling in her new dress, her pair of new platform shoes, and slinging a new hand bag over her shoulder. Her flaunting of her new apparel causes eye brows to be raised. When she gives out that her new look is due to the generous purse of John, the son of *Kĩoi*, her

parents raise objections, brand her a whore, and order that she return them to his beau and be content with her lot.

*“And I go back to my rags?”* she shoots back. Her father counsels, *“A man brags about his penis however small. A poor house, but mine!”* He warns her not to overstep the boundaries. But she pooh-poohs this warning and accompanies her boyfriend John to Mombasa for a week against her parents’ expressed wishes.

Not long after Kĩgũũnda and Wangeci decide to have a church wedding, but realizing the heavy financial burden entailed they turn to their newly-found family-in-Christ, the Kĩois, for financial assistance. In order to give this assistance Kĩoi induces Kĩgũũnda to use the title-deed of his one-and-a-half acres land as security so that he, Kĩoi, would vouch for him at the bank. Things work out well and Kĩgũũnda obtains the loan.

There’s a turn-around in their material life and Kĩgũũnda and Wangeci refurbish their home and acquire a few modern items. Just as Kĩgũũnda and Wangeci are reveling over their impending wedding, matters turn sore and sour. Gathoni returns home in tears and with a tattered soul. John has jilted her! But worse than that, he has impregnated her but refused responsibility for the pregnancy.

*Kĩgũũnda* and *Wangeci* stomp to the *Kĩois* and present this problem. The *Kĩois* defend their son and call *Gathoni* a whore. An altercation ensues and *Kĩgũũnda* is shot and wounded. *Kĩoi* sacks *Kĩgũũnda* and the bank demands that *Kĩgũũnda* repay the loan. He reneges in his commitment to the bank, and a

series of adverse events culminate in mayhem, loss of his land to *Kĩoi*, and his wallowing in drunkenness.

## **THEMES AND MEANINGS**

*I Will Marry When I Want* concerns itself mainly with the betrayal of the aspirations of the masses of people in Kenya by the postindependence African leadership. Contrary to the expectations of the people, following Kenya's independence from British rule, that the land would be restored to the indigenous population, independence seemed only to increase further the scramble for European investors. Illustrative of the country's economic policy are the frequent allusions to land acquisitions for the purpose of building additional factories, such as the insecticide factory, that specialize in exported goods. Kioi's and Nditika's wealth largely stems from their European alliance, which often results in their serving as figureheads for foreign industries based in the country. When Nditika proposes that Kioi consider serving as the local director for the insecticide project, he describes the responsibility as being no different from his present directorship of the local bank: It's not much work. It's just a matter of one or two board meetings. You become overseer. Just as you now oversee their banks. You and I will be like watchdogs.

The theme of betrayal is evident as well in reference to the "Homeguard," a quasi-military attachment of the British police force made up of African loyalists whose responsibility was to help restore calm after a series of Mau Mau raids and attacks. In effect, the Homeguard was to assist the British police by



identifying and incarcerating suspected Mau Mau members. Such actions

taken by the Homeguard against fellow Africans were perceived by Ngugi wa Thiong'o as treacherous. Ndugire, a nouveau riche farmer in *I Will Marry When I Want*, is identified as a member of the Homeguard who has profited materially from the European alliance, but at the price of his own humanity. He confesses that "I used to kill people,/ And to do many other terrible deeds/ As was the habit among the homeguards of those days."

## **THE PLAY**

The set of the opening scene in *I Will Marry When I Want* reveals the stark living conditions of Kiguunda, a common laborer, his wife, Wangeci, and their teenage daughter, Gathoni. The three of them share a one-room house that is sparsely furnished and decorated. It consists of a bed for Kiguunda and Wangeci, a broken folding chair, and a cooking pot that sits on three stones. A pile of rags on the floor establishes that "the floor is Gathoni's bed and the rags, her bedding." Prominently displayed on the wall is a framed title-deed for one and a half acres of land, a plot that was purchased after the Mau Mau Revolution of the 1950's, a guerrilla war waged by the Kikuyu, along with members of other tribal groups of Kenya, to reclaim the land from British settlers.

As the play opens, the family is making preparations for the arrival of important guests. Kiguunda is repairing the broken leg of a folding chair, while Wangeci is busy preparing a stew to serve to the guests. The makeshift

nature of their accommodations reinforces the impression of the family's substandard living conditions. Wangeci, who has spent thirty cents on cooking oil and sugar, discovers that another important staple, salt, is missing and has to send the daughter, Gathoni, to borrow from the Gicaambas. During this bustling activity, the title-deed falls to the floor of the hut. Kiguunda picks it up gingerly and studies it carefully before returning it to the wall, his actions as well as his words identifying him as a proud landowner, despite the family's humble living conditions. In response to Wangeci, who asks why he gazes at the title-deed, Kiguunda explains that "these [one and a half acres] are worth more to me/ Than all the thousands that belong to Ahab Kioi wa Kanoru."

With the entrance of Kioi, a wealthy landowner, who is accompanied by another landowning couple, Samuel and Helen Ndugire, the framed title-deed again falls conspicuously to the floor of the hut. Literally, the crash is caused by the cramped living quarters; figuratively, it connotes the likelihood of land loss to the wealthy visitors, who deliberately seek to veil the true purpose of their visit.

The conflict in act 1 stems from the uncertainty surrounding the nature of Kioi's mission. Although prior to Kioi's visit Kiguunda had produced a letter from Ikuua wa Nditika, Kioi's partner, wherein Nditika had proposed

purchasing Kiguunda's plot of land in order to construct an insecticide factory, Kioi makes no reference to the letter during the course of his visit. The confusion of Kiguunda and Wangeci is further compounded by their daughter's present involvement with John Muhuuni, the son of Kioi and Jezebel.

## CHARACTERS DISCUSSED

### *Kiguunda*

Kiguunda (kee-gew-EWN-dah), a farm laborer and smallholder of one and one-half acres in postcolonial Kenya. Although his efforts as a Mau Mau guerrilla on behalf of independence have been followed by a life of labor and hardship, he is a proud man. When his employer, Kioi, and others visit him in his one-room, mud-walled home to convert him to Christianity and insist that he “marry” his wife of many years, he takes his sword from the wall and drives them out. Later, believing that their motive was to legitimize a marriage between his daughter Gathoni and their son, he repents, offers to undertake the ceremony, and puts up his small-holding to secure a bank loan that will cover the large expenses of a Christian wedding. After Gathoni is made pregnant and discarded by Kioi’s son, Kiguunda again threatens Kioi. Subsequently, he loses his job and his smallholding. He becomes an abusive drunk until his friend and neighbor recalls him to a fervent belief in overthrowing the tyranny of the rich.

### *Gicaamba*

Gicaamba (gee-kah-AHM-bah), a factory worker and neighbor and friend of Kiguunda. Gicaamba’s proletarian distrust of the native rich, their foreign investors, and the oppressive use both make of Christianity helps at first to keep Kiguunda’s own skepticism alive. After Kiguunda is ruined, Gicaamba’s militant call to class action revives the broken man’s spirit.

**WANGECI** - *Kiguunda's wife*

**GATHONI** - *their daughter*

**NJOOKI** - *Gicaamba's wife*

**AHAB KIOI WA KANORU** - *wealthy farmer and businessman. Also the factory owner who uses his connections to defraud the peasant and his wife of their land.*

**JEZEBEL** - *Kioi's wife*

**SAMUEL NDUGIRE** - *Nouveau riche farmer and shopkeeper*

**HELEN** - *Ndugire's wife*

**IKUUA WANDITIKA** - *Kio's business partner*

## **DRAMATIC DEVICES**

The betrayal of the African peoples, as well as the African culture, by the ruling elite is encapsulated in Ngugi's identification of their adoption of Christian names. Kioi's wife Jezebel is reminiscent of the biblical Jezebel, wife of the Israeli king Ahab, who forcibly appropriated the vineyard belonging to Naboth after he had refused to sell it. She accomplished this by sending letters in King Ahab's name to the community's elders with orders that Naboth be stoned to death for disobeying the king's orders. The Jezebel in *I Will Marry When I Want* is no less willful. It is she who surreptitiously produces a gun, thereby rescuing Kioi, also named Ahab, from a threat upon his life by Kiguunda. The weapon also shows the extent of Jezebel's assimilation of Western culture; Kiguunda, on the other hand, is armed only with a sword, a relic of the Mau Mau revolutionary war of the 1950's.

Ngugi perceives the conversion to Christianity as another form of treason, involving the disavowal of traditional customs and the acceptance of alien ones. This cultural treason is dramatized in scene 1 of act 3, when Kiguunda and Wangeci

are transported to the site of their anticipated wedding. Vows are exchanged, or renewed, and Kiguunda and Wangeci are immediately given the Christian names “Winston Smith Kiguunda and Rosemary Magdalene Wangeci.” The change of names, symbolizing a change of identity, is a dramatic device used by Ngugi to suggest the extent to which cultural imperialism penetrates the consciousness of its victims.

### **CRITICAL CONTEXT**

*I Will Marry When I Want* is a drama that celebrates, in a series of flashbacks, the events of the *Mau Mau Revolution* that quickened the pace of Kenya’s march toward independence. References are made throughout the drama to the taking of oaths not to betray fellow members of the organization to British authorities or to sell land to the Europeans. After these vows are administered, the initiates pass in pairs through an “arch of banana leaves to the other side.”

These allusions to the Mau Mau are also used as time markers. Kiguunda recalls his courtship of Wangeci as taking place “long before the state of Emergency,” a period from 1952 to 1962 that saw the establishment of the Homeguard and the subsequent arrest and detention of suspected Mau Mau members. The frequent allusions to the martyred Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimaathi, who is praised in songs, contrast with references to the Homeguard, whose ascendancy to power is described as the result of crooked means. Hence, *I Will Marry When I Want* may be read as a tribute by Ngugi to Mau Mau leaders, those he considers the progenitors of Kenya’s freedom

and the rightful heirs of political leadership in postindependence Kenya.

Ngugi's criticism of the economic policy of Kenya's leaders in *I Will Marry When I Want* led to the banning of the play, and was in part the cause of his imprisonment from 1977 to 1979. Originally written in his native language.